

AMERICAN IDEA OF LIBERTY.

Speech of Hon. James M. Scovel, Delivered in Camden Jan. 1, 1867, at the Concert for the Benefit of Friendless Children.

Ladies and Gentlemen—I have been requested to speak here by the Committee, to whose industry we are indebted for this great demonstration on behalf of the noble charity which, thanks to the exertions of self-sacrificing women and generous men, has grown successfully into usefulness and permanence.

And thus American liberty, the idea of which I will endeavor to present, is not without an intimate relation to the immediate object of the present occasion. Your home for the friendless is more than an asylum for the orphan—it is a school also. Not only a place for shelter and protection, but a home for culture and advancement in learning.

It is true that the battle is over. Military parents no longer fill our streets (unless the "Boys in Blue" chance to parade); no list of killed and wounded is now read with eager eyes and thrilling hearts.

And we can devoutly and with national thanksgiving, rejoice that in the republic, floating out on the ensanguined sea of civil commotion, there was intelligence, integrity and patriotism enough to anchor safe to liberty.

Every genuine nationality owes much to the noble natures, to the men of rare endowments, who are at the same time ambitious and prudent in their patriotic impulses, and who would risk for their country far more than they would receive from her.

This class of men did much to save this nation. I know none more illustrious than James Washington, a New York man of great simplicity of manner, a true scholar, a soldier, and who left his broad paternal acres to die for his country at the head of his brigade. He is the type of thousands.

When we commonly speak of liberty, we mean political liberty; but liberty, properly speaking, is a complex idea. So we have natural liberty, which consists in the power of acting as one thinks fit, without any restraint or control, except from the laws of nature.

Political liberty is really the liberty of a nation, though sometimes confounded with civil liberty. Religious liberty comes next—the liberty for which Luther fought; for which leader women and men, sailing out of Deft Haven, landed upon a bleak and barren shore on the 15th of November, 1620.

In the brief period (a sort of interlude between the more interesting exercises of the evening), I mean to trace very closely to define, or follow the history of liberty since the middle ages. That alone would be a separate study, to trace how closely connected is the civil and religious liberty we enjoy to-day with the spirit of chivalry, and the ideas of munificence and honor and personal independence. This personal liberty, in its thorough development, is the keystone of the arch of modern liberty, the centre of all the separate rates of which liberty in general is composed.

It would take an evening properly to explain that sturdy lion of religious independence which sent the Mayflower across the ocean with a more than mortal courage, which bore imperial Caesar back to his Roman triumph.

It was the rude barbarians of Germany who introduced the sentiment of personal independence, this individual liberty, into European civilization; it was unknown among the Romans and unknown in the Christian Church; it was unknown in nearly all the civilizations of antiquity. Liberty in the ancient civilization was only the liberty of the citizen.

He cared little then for personal liberty. And when we look profoundly into this question, we find something of a noble and moral character in this taste for independence, which seems to derive its power from its moral nature. It is the pleasure or feeling oneself a man; the sentiment of personality, of human spontaneity.

From this narrow nationality there arose in the middle ages the feeling of universal brotherhood as soon as military life had entered on its defensive phase, and all-superior creeds had spontaneously merged into a monotheistic form. The growth of chivalry, and the attempt made to effect a permanent separation of the social powers, announced already the subordination of politics to morals, and thus showed that the conception of humanity was in direct course of preparation.

Here we have the American idea of liberty springing from the seed of culture in the middle ages—the idea that politics should become moral by a union with natural justice. And of this idea, old John Brown, of Ossawatimie, who, with something less than fifty men, frightened Virginia and her militia out of their property, among the noblest and grandest apostles. His memory will live forever as the type of heroism and of self-sacrifice.

His death "colled the knell of old formalities," and henceforth the world's knights are self-consecrated. We love his deathless memory, and he who he offended against the unjust laws of Virginia, but because he died to make all men free. And to-day at sunset, the English soldiers of Queen Victoria, as they unsling their rifles beside the river Thames, sing—

"John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the dust, But his soul is marching on."

And some great painter, huddling for immortality, will catch in his palette the grand old man, condemned to death for hate to slavery, on the road to that gallows where he died to make all men free—

"Stooped between the jeering ranks, To kiss the negro's hand."

Hailam, the historian, thinks that the three powerful spirits which have from time to time swept over the face of the nation, and which predominate impulse to the moral sentiments and energies of mankind, are the spirits of religion, of liberty, and of honor. It was the principal business of chivalry to animate and cherish the best of these spirits, and whatever high magnanimous energy the love of liberty or religious zeal has ever imparted, was equalled by the exquisite sense of honor which this institution preserved. And if we had opportunity, we could read the story of the faith, the courage, and the patriotism of the nineteenth century owe to the influence of chivalry. And the same writer thinks that the most beautiful picture of the true spirit of chivalry was the Achilles of Homer, the representative of the sure guarantee that violence shall never ultimately triumph; that sooner or later despotism shall always be overthrown; and that the great and permanent interests of the human race are injured by the wicked counsels of unjust men.

We would not, and indeed could not speak disrespectfully of the highest legal tribunal of the land, but cannot forbear giving you a glimpse of the ancient custom which has led to the law narrow a man's mind by sharpening it, and, in his opinion, "all great lawyers were great rascals," and it does just now occur to us that a greater man than Jeremy Bentham did pronounce in front of us.

But there is a brighter side to the picture. The world has advanced. I have endeavored faintly, I know, and imperfectly—to trace how religion, from out of which grew the future, a brighter and connected ancient and modern civilization.

Personal independence, with its leaven of barbarism, strengthened by a rude morality, gave birth to culture, and with culture to political liberty, distinct and connected ancient and modern civilization.

"Science struck the thrones of Earth and Heaven, Small shook, but fell not; and the harmonious mind Poured itself forth in all prophetic song; It was the dawn of a new era, and the world was wakened, exempt from mortal care, Godlike over the clear blue of sweet sound, And human hands; first mimicked, and then made."

With moulded limbs, more lovely than its own, The human form, till marble grew divine."

But, ladies and gentlemen, before I have done, I beg your indulgence when I speak of a noble and your apostle of the idea I have so imperfectly endeavored to explain. He was a son of Maryland. He was remarkable for a heart alive to and in sympathy with the interests of humanity; for a mind endowed with rare sensibility; and so strong in the logic of common sense, that, by the simple right to command, he led the column in the contest in Maryland before the law, a contest for ideas elevating in principle, and rising from the long years of the elemental foundation of the republic itself. I knew him well. He was the flower of courtesy and ambition. But that character cannot be generalized, and I commend to the consideration of a mind of no ordinary powers, of the correctness of a political principle, and then bids him to adhere to it with relentless tenacity through victory or defeat.

In the battle to emancipate Maryland, Henry Winter Davis was in the fore front of the light, and the people welcomed him in the words of the knightly Andalusian king:—"Take, then, the leading of the van, charge the Moor's again; There is not such a lance as thine In all the hosts of Spain."

Like Azigleo, he expressed the noblest sentiments and principles in language of simple and earnest vigor. He repudiated statecraft, which, in his quarters, he mistook for patriotism and was not unmindful that integrity is better than cunning; and held that good sense and good faith are all the true statesman requires to guide him, even in perilous situations.

In doing battle for God and liberty, he relied upon the virtue of the people, and upon the absolute power of truth and fidelity. He will go down with the history of our country as one of our most accomplished orators, and one of our most cultured statesmen. He was eloquent in saying just what ought to be said, and no more. Voltaire says that the "Wine of genius is active warfare." The career of Winter Davis was a warfare of the truth of the aphorism. His conflicts are over. He is great, but he is not wicked and causeless revolt; everywhere subdued; all the footprint of a traitor in arms no longer desecrated American soil. In the full vigor and maturity of his mental and physical energies, and just at the time when his services seem to have been most needed in the great cause of human rights, he has been called away from the fray by the fiat of that Wisdom which is with God. He is gone with Baker, with Kearney, with Abraham Lincoln; with those we loved once and whose memories we now revere; the apostles, the soldiers, the triumphant martyrs of liberty; and standing over the grave of Henry Winter Davis, we weep there, we write—"Here lies one of our noblest and bravest soldiers who ever fought for the liberation of humanity."

truth that God never made any man a slave, but created all men free and equal. The American idea of liberty demands that the liberty of all shall be limited by the like liberty of each. If the name of liberty is darkly stated in certain quarters, it is determined, guided by the ideas of associations generated by a long course of events—ideas of associations which have given the atrocity of the day, say, with clenched hands and stubborn lips, to nullify the will of the people, then the will of the American people will nullify that Court with the same terrible certainty with which the conscience of the North swept away the Dred Scott inquiry. A grosser and more wantonly than the scimitar of the Saracen Saladin in another Supreme Court decision, in the interest of slavery would stand before the free, hot breath of a popular tornado.

"Al!" said a great painter who hung breathless over the creation of his magic pencil, "I paint for eternity. And so may the statesman of his day say, with clenched hands and stubborn lips over the graves of our dead, 'We are building a republic upon justice, and we are building it for eternity.'" "A republic," says John Milton, "ought to be the great statue of a honest man, and the only one that shall make the republic of America. And it is a more magnificent struggle than the Missouri Compromise; or the annexation of Texas; or the acquisition of California; or the bloody strife of Kansas; and it is a more universal liberty, and thus for a better Union, vitalized by the principles of equality and liberty."

Before the splendor of that struggle which is upon us now, whose thunders to-day can be heard in the heart of chambers; here that conflict, in the heart of which lies the destinies of millions yet to be; big with the destinies of your children and mine to the latest generation, the clash of resounding arms reaching through the terrible years, huddles into thin air, because the triumph or disaster of this conflict will decide whether liberty shall go forward or shall fall, whether that principle shall die, or outlast time and live forever; and the patriot heart feels in the heart, while it contemplates the advancing triumph of the right. As the great author of the "History of Civilization" nobly says:—"Cruelty to-day produces sympathy tomorrow, a better sense of justice contributes more than any other principle to correct the inequalities of life and to maintain the balance of affairs. It is the loathing at tyranny which, by stirring to their utmost depths the waiting feelings of the heart, makes it impossible that tyranny should ever finally succeed. This, in truth, is the noble side of our nature. This is that part of us which, stamped with a red-hot seal, reveals its divine origin, and providing for the safety of the community, and the sure guarantee that violence shall never ultimately triumph; that sooner or later despotism shall always be overthrown; and that the great and permanent interests of the human race are injured by the wicked counsels of unjust men."

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I will not make a single passage from a great speech of the great orator upon the floor of Congress. He was rebuking the attempt made to recognize the independence of the Confederacy party belonging to Jeff. Davis, and chiding to the South. He used this language:—"Until that day, in the name of the American nation, in the name of every honest man, I declare that there is no one dead for the holy cause, in the name of those who stand before us in the ranks of battle, in the name of the liberty our ancestors have excluded, and I devote to eternal execration the name of him who shall attempt to destroy this blessed land rather than its enemies."

"But what that time arrives, it is the judgement of the American people, they shall be no more; that ruin to ourselves or ruin to the Southern Rebels are the only alternatives. It is only by resolutions of this kind that nations can cry like this. It is only by turning France into a camp, resolved that Europe shall not subordinate but should not subordinate her, that France is the leading empire of Europe to-day."

"It is by such a resolve that the American people, corning a reluctant Government to draw the sword, and stake the national existence on the integrity of the republic, are now anything but the treatment of a nation before the world, the scorn and hiss of every petty tyrant. It is because the people of the United States, rising to the height of the occasion, dedicated this generation to the sword, and pouring out the blood of their children as we account, and voting before high Heaven that there should be no end to this conflict but ruin absolute or absolute triumph, that we are now what we are, that the banner of the republic, still pointing onward, floats proudly in the face of the enemy; that vast region, are reduced to obedience to the laws; and that a great host in armed array now presses with steady step into the dark regions of the Rebellion. It is on y by the earnest and abiding resolution of the people that, whatever shall be our fate, it shall be made as the American nation, worthy of that republic which first trod the path of empire, and made no peace but under the banners of victory; that the American people will survive in history, and that will survive, and shall succeed, and not fail, I have an abiding confidence in the firmness, the patience, and the endurance of the American people; and having avowed to stand in history on the great resolve to accept of nothing but victory, ruin, or victory is ours. And if with such heroic resolve we fall, we fall with honor, and transmit the name of liberty committed to our keeping unimpaired, to be handed on to future generations. The historian of our decline and fall, contemplating the ruins of the last great republic, and drawing from its late lessons of wisdom on the waywardness of men, shall drop a tear, as he records with sorrow the vain hopes of that people who dedicated their lives to the cause of freedom, and by their example will keep alive her worship in the hearts of men till happier generations shall learn to walk in her path. Yet, sir, if we must fall, let our ruins be stained by no weakness. If we must fall, let us stand amid the crash of the falling Republic, and be buried in its ruins, so that history may take note that men lived in the middle of the nineteenth century worthy of a better fate, but chastised by God for the sins of their forefathers. Let the ruins of the Republic remain to testify to the latest generations our greatness and our heroism. And let liberty, crownless and unshorn, lie upon the ruins, crying aloud in a sad wail to the nations of the world—I nursed and brought up children, and they rebelled against me."

Let the young men of our land who sneer at the rights of mankind, who have no regard for the rights of the services, and suffer ages of the 'bondmen' two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil—"Let those who think it 'injustice' to enter the lists for the rights of the many against the oppressors of the few—let us have a better fate, but chastised by God for the sins of their forefathers. Let the ruins of the Republic remain to testify to the latest generations our greatness and our heroism. And let liberty, crownless and unshorn, lie upon the ruins, crying aloud in a sad wail to the nations of the world—I nursed and brought up children, and they rebelled against me."

We have but this one country. It is the heritage of every man and woman, who loves and walks beneath the nation's flag. There must be and there will be no distracted class. The moment you sanction the principle that there shall be a distracted class, that moment you sanction a principle which will destroy the permanence of the republic. The Bible and the Declaration of Independence will give the inspiration by which we will construct constitutional liberty. As these little children are taught to love their country, let them be taught that in America the human law is only a reflex of that divine law which proclaims the equality of man; that in God's sight there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian, bond or free."

And as the rising sun kisses the banner of our country, every eye will open, and longing hearts will yearn towards us from Ireland under the yoke, from England cursed by privilege, from France rising from the long years of retribution from the tyranny of Rome; and the prayers of the oppressed in every land will ascend in thankfulness to God that in all the world there is one land, and that land America, where there is neither coffee, nor shackle, nor slave-mart, or any other symbol of human bondage, but where "the voice of the oppressor is no more heard forever," and where it is the Christian statesman's boast that "Pure law commensures perfect freedom."

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Office in the first floor Building of the Philadelphia National Bank, CHESTNUT Street above Fourth. This company receives on deposit, and GUARANTEES THE SAFE KEEPING OF VALUABLES upon the following rates a year, viz.:—

DRY GOODS. MILLIKEN'S LINEN STORE. 828 ARCH STREET.

Fine Table Cloths. Fine Napkins and Doylies. Extra Large Table Cloths. Napkins to Match.

UPWARDS OF 200 PIECES. Heavy Power-Loom Table Linen.

FROM 75 CENTS PER YARD.

THE LARGEST LINEN STOCK IN THE CITY. Selling at Importer's Prices.

FARIES & WARNER, No. 229 North NINTH Street, ABOVE RACE.

Will open to-day—One case Waltham Pillow-case Muslin, at 25 cents per yard, slightly wet. Cheapest Pillow-case Muslin in the city.

FLANNELS. All-wool Flannels, 37, 40, 42, 45, 50c, etc. Bargains in yard-wide Shaker Flannel, 90 cents.

FARIES & WARNER, No. 229 North NINTH Street, above Race.

PRICE & WOOD, N. W. Corner EIGHTH and FILBERT, HAVE JUST OPENED.

Several cases of Bleached Muslins, yard wide, 20, 25, 28, and 31 cents per yard. Williamsville, Wametta, New York Mills, and Utica.

Yard-wide Unbleached Muslins, 19, 23, and 26 cents. 1-6, 8-4, 9-4, and 10-4 Shooting Muslins. 1 case extra heavy 5-4 Pillow-case Muslin, 25 cents per yard.

Best Quality American Prints, 18, 20 cents. Heavy Power-loom Table Linens. Just opened, 100 dozen Heavy Linen Towels, 22 cents.

Linen Napkins, \$3.00 up to \$8.00 per dozen. Russia Crash, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 30, and 33 cents. A large assortment of Ladies' and Gents' Hemstitched Handkerchiefs.

Ladies' Linen Handkerchiefs, 13, 14, 19, 20, 25, and 31 cents. A large lot of Ladies' French Cloth Gloves, 50, 55, 62, 65, 69, and 75 cents. Gents' Cloth Gloves. (10) 32 Ladies' and Gents' Merino Vests and Pants, etc.

PRICE & WOOD, N. W. CORNER EIGHTH and FILBERT. WHOLESALE COTTON YARN COMMISSION WAREHOUSE. R. T. WHITE & CO., Manufacturer's Agents for the sale of COTTON WARPS and SKEIN YARNS, all numbers. HOSIERY YARNS in the skein or cop. COITON, WOOLLEN, and LINEN CARPET CHAIRS, etc.